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NORTHEAST MARINE MONUMENT UNDER REVIEW, BEATON HOPES FOR MODIFICATIONS

By Michael P. Norton

STATE HOUSE NEWS SERVICE

STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, MAY 23, 2017...The state's top environmental official hopes the Trump administration modifies President Barack Obama's 2016 designation of a marine monument area off the Massachusetts coast, which is on the Trump administration's list of areas under review.

"Yeah, I think modified in the sense that it echoes what we put forward in our original comment letter, recognizing the work that went into the ocean managment plan and the public process around this issue," Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Matt Beaton told the News Service.

Environmental protection activists last year applauded Obama's decision, made under powers granted through the Antiquities Act, to create the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument covering a more than 4,900 square mile area southeast of Cape Cod. The designation came with strict limits on fishing that were greeted with pushback from port communities and some elected officials, including Gov. Charlie Baker, whose administration knocked an alleged lack of public process, potential negative impacts on commercial fishing, and conflicts with existing marine fisheries planning processes.

An executive order issued by Trump on April 26 called for a review of all monument declarations made since Jan. 1, 1996 that cover more than 100,000 acres or where the secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior determines that the designation "was made without adequate public outreach and coordination with relevant stakeholders."

The Interior Department on May 5 released a list of marine monuments under review and the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts is on it, along with four areas in the Pacific Ocean. A 60-day comment period was opened on May 12 and "finally gives a voice to local communities and states when it comes to Antiquities Act monument designations," Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke said in a statement. He added, "There is no pre-determined outcome on any monument. I look forward to hearing from and engaging with local communities and stakeholders as this process continues."

Beaton did not express a preference for desired modifications, but said, "Hopefully the new administration takes those points into account and with future action makes appropriate decisions that reflect, you know, the opinions of the states."

The U.S. Department of Commerce will lead the review of the marine national

monuments in consultation with Zinke, and it appears energy considerations are emerging as a factor, along with impacts on fishing and what Obama called "fragile ecosystems off the coast of New England."

Trump in an April 28 executive order gave the commerce department lead responsibilities in developing an offshore energy strategy.

Under a section of that order governing planning for future offshore energy potential, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, who has had a long career in business, is directed to "refrain from designating or expanding any National Marine Sanctuary under the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, 16 U.S.C. 1431 et seq., unless the sanctuary designation or expansion proposal includes a timely, full accounting from the Department of the Interior of any energy or mineral resource potential within the designated area including offshore energy from wind, oil, natural gas, methane hydrates, and any other sources that the Secretary of Commerce deems appropriate and the potential impact the proposed designation or expansion will have on the development of those resources."

Under the offshore energy order, the review of marine monuments by Ross must include an analysis of the budgetary impacts of the costs of managing each marine sanctuary or monument and a look at the "opportunity costs associated with potential energy and mineral exploration and production from the Outer Continental Shelf, in addition to any impacts on production in the adjacent region."

The Interior Department is also reviewing the monument designation assigned in 2016 to Katahdin Woods and Waters in Maine.

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